DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 251 UD 022 907

AUTHOR Dougherty, Van; Odden, Allan
TITLE States Move toward School Improvement.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT State Education Leader; v1 n3 p4 Sum 1982

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Improvement; *Improvement Programs; Program Descriptions; *State Programs; State School District Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Colorado; Connecticut; Minnesota; New Jersey; North Carolina; PF Project

ABSTRACT

In the past few years, numerous states have initiated school improvement programs. These programs have included any or all of the following characteristics: (1) teacher and administrator certification and competency tests; (2) school-based planning; (3) staff development; (4) student assessment; (5) revised curricula and instructional strategies; and (6) student competency tests and revised accreditation standards. New Jersey has developed a comprehensive plan to implement a "thorough and efficient" (T&E) system in which schools are able to identify problem areas and provide remediation. Minnesota has combined two programs, Some Essential Learner Outcomes (SELOs) and Planning, Evaluation and Reporting (PER), to develop a process for curriculum planning and evaluation which addresses its specific needs. Colorado's plan has focused on accreditation requirements, accountability, school climate improvement, and Individually Guided Education (IGE). In North Carolina, eight regional service centers are used to provide technical assistance to local districts and schools. The Connecticut School Effectiveness Project is a voluntary school-site approach in which the local faculty is responsible for developing its own plans. (DC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

State education Leader • Summer 1982 v/n3 p4

ED235251

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B. WILLIAMS
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

States Move Toward School Improvement

by Van Dougherty, research assistant, and Allan Odden, director, Education Programs Division, ECS.

In the past few years, accountability issues, school finance reform and the increased interest of governors and legislators in education have prompted numerous states to initiate school improvement programs. These efforts vary widely in goals, comprehensiveness, style of operation, method of implementation and financing.

Some state programs are comprehensive and include new teacher and administrator certification requirements or competency tests; school-based planning; staff development; student assessment; revised curricula and new instruction strategies; student competency tests and revised accreditation standards. Others focus on only one or two of the above components. All programs reflect the political traditions of the state (e.g., state leadership versus local control) as well as the support or nonsupport of legislators and governors for state leadership in education.

New Jersey

New Jersey's school improvement effort reflects a comprehensive approach, with strong state leadership and substantial new funding. It began with a school finance court mandate to the legislature to define and implement a "thorough and efficient" (T&E) education system. In defining this concept, the legislature included four factors: state goals for education, a T&E education planning process, state technical assistance and evaluation. Specific goals for student achievement in the basic skills were set and are monitored through annual tests. The T&E planning process requires schools and school districts to work through a seven-step process every five years: developing goals, setting student assessment objectives, finding out what students need and selecting appropriate programs, organizing budgets to support programs, training people to carry them out and evaluating the results.

By matching needs, programs and assessment results with the state-mandated standards, schools are able to identify problem areas and provide remediation. The state department of education, through 21 county offices, four education improvement centers and central staff, provides extensive technical assistance to schools and school districts in developing plans. The county offices annually evaluate the schools and school districts and monitor their progress throughout the year.

Minnesota

In Minnesota, Governor Albert Quie's interest in education prompted the legislature and the state department of education to develop new education improvement strategies, and to involve more school district residents in planning and evaluating the curriculum. State efforts rely on two major integrated programs, Some Essential Learner Outcomes (SELOs) and Planning, Evaluation and Reporting (PER) legislation.

SELOs, with a focus on basic skills, grew out of the statewide assessment program. Since Minnesota does not mandate curriculum, SELOs are intended to help local districts develop their own intructional programs. This curriculum guide also enables teachers to analyze their teaching effectiveness through locally administered tests or through the Minnesota Assessment Program.

The PER legislation requires districts to develop an instruction plan that includes measurable learner outcomes and to report to the public their education plans, curriculum choices and student outcomes. It is intended to help people decide which programs and services schools can and should provide.

By combining the two programs, school districts are able to develop a process for curriculum planning and evaluation that addresses their specific needs. Under the provisions of the law, the state department is required to provide technical assistance — either through the department or the nine cooperative educational service units — to districts creating instruction plans and assessments. A council on quality education awards grants, funded by the legislature, to some schools for special improvement programs.

UD022907

Colorado

In Colorado, there is a balance between local responsibility for education programs and state leadership to ensure that accountability and school planning are carried out. Very little new money has been needed. School accreditation requirements and the Educational Accountability Act work together to form the basis of the state's school improvement program. In 1980, new legislation provided the state board of education with authority to accredit school districts and required all districts to comply with the state's 1971 accountability law as one condition of accreditation. The accountability law requires all districts to develop a continuing five-year plan based on local priorities for education improvement programs. In addition, each district is asked to develop a two-year plan for each school.

During 1980-81, two additional programs were added. The state department of education began the first year of a three-year pilot, the Climate Improvement Program, along with Individually Guided Education (IGE). The Climate Improvement Program is designed to improve student attitudes and achievements by improving school climates; characteristics of individual schools are assessed and programs to eliminate student alienation are developed. In the IGE program, teachers are trained in individualized instruction techniques designed to help more students master basic skills.

North Carolina

Some states avoid regulations or requirements almost entirely and rely on technical assistance from either the state education agency or regional centers to promote local improvement. For example, North Carolina uses teams from eight regional service centers to aid local districts and schools. These centers are staffed with department specialists and consultants with expertise in staff development, child nutrition, exceptional children, curriculum, vocational education and community/school relations. They hold workshops, help write grant proposals and help develop plans and budgets. A principals' institute, through the regional centers, focuses on principals' needs, time management, stress and performance appraisal. Most of the state education agency's services are delivered through these centers — branches of the department of public instruction, not intermediate units.

The state also tests students as they move through school, and administers a competency test in grade 11 for high school graduation.

Governor James B. Hunt Jr. has made education improvement a keystone of his statewide economic development plan and the programs described above have received substantial new money as a result.

Connecticut

In Connecticut, a tradition of strong local autonomy constrains the state education agency from mandating statewide school improvements. Nevertheless, the state is promoting a broad array of efforts directed at local educational quality, such as curriculum guides, statewide proficiency exams for ninth graders, teacher development and school effectiveness projects that rely on local initiative for success.

The Connecticut School Effectiveness Project is a voluntary school-site approach using a facilitator from either the state education agency or regional education service centers. The facilities help local districts develop action plans for improving student achievement, using student assessment data and current knowledge from effective teaching research. In each school, the entire faculty is involved. They decide whether or not to participate in the project, and, if they do, they help develop the action plan. Resource persons help implement various plan components. As schools develop their own problem-solving and capacity-building abilities, facilitators' roles diminish. The goal is to produce improved student achievement by the end of the second year of action.

Other states have developed alternative approaches to school-based education improvement programs and the activities discussed above are not the only ones in those states. The fact is that many states and local school districts have begun new and exciting school improvement initiatives, all aimed at improving performance in the basic skills and revitalizing education quality in the nation.★